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UNCLAS VATICAN 006026

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR EUR/WE (MENNUUTI), EUR/PD/PA (HILTON)

FROM EMBASSY VATICAN MESSAGE NUMBER 204/01

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PINR](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: AGE PREVENTS POPE TRAVELING TO OCEANIA

1. POPE JOHN PAUL II'S INCREASING INFIRMITY HAS PREVENTED HIM TRAVELING TO OCEANIA TO PROMULGATE A NEW CHURCH DOCUMENT FOR THE REGION. THE VATICAN CITED DISTANCE AND THE EFFECT OF THE FLIGHT ON THE POPE'S HEALTH AS THE REASONS FOR ISSUING THE DOCUMENT IN ROME, NOVEMBER 22, VIA INTERNET (A FIRST FOR THE VATICAN). IN THE RECENT PAST, THE POPE HAS CONDUCTED THE
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PAGE 02 VATICA 06026 231203Z
PRESENTATION CEREMONIES IN THE REGIONS THAT WERE THE SUBJECT OF PREVIOUS DOCUMENTS: THE AMERICAS, AFRICA, EUROPE AND ASIA.

2. POPE JOHN PAUL II IS 81. HE IS BECOMING FRAILER WITH EACH PASSING YEAR. IT IS NO SECRET THAT THE POPE SUFFERS FROM A NEUROLOGICAL DISEASE, PROBABLY PARKINSON'S. THE VATICAN HAS INSTITUTED VARIOUS PROCEDURES AND TOOLS TO MAKE LIFE EASIER FOR THE PONTIFF - A SPECIAL LECTERN ON HIS CHAIR FOR THE PAGES OF HIS SPEECHES BECAUSE TREMORS PRECLUDE HIM HOLDING THE TEXT; A WHEELED PLATFORM TO MOVE HIM UP THE AISLE OF SAINT PETER'S BASILICA. (THE AISLE IS 211 METERS LONG). POPE JOHN PAUL NOW WEARS A HEARING AID, ALTHOUGH HE DOES NOT REQUIRE SPECTACLES TO READ, AND OFTEN USES A CANE WHEN WALKING.

3. COMMENT: THE VATICAN IS ADAPTING ITSELF TO THE NEEDS OF THE AGING AND INCREASINGLY FRAIL POPE. THE PONTIFF INSISTS ON PERFORMING AS MANY OF HIS DUTIES AS POSSIBLE. ALTHOUGH HIS SCHEDULE HAS BEEN REDUCED TO THE ESSENTIAL, IT WOULD BE DEMANDING FOR ANY OCTOGENARIAN. WHILE THE POPE'S BODY MAY BE SLOWING DOWN, ALL THOSE WHO MEET WITH THE POPE SAY HIS MIND REMAINS ACTIVE AND ALERT. THE VATICAN WILL CONTINUE TO ACCOMMODATE THE AGING PONTIFF SO THAT THE DIGNITY AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE PUBLIC NATURE OF THE OFFICE IS MAINTAINED FOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE. END COMMENT. NICHOLSON

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